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## Management Consultancy As Practice: A Study Of The Duality Of The Management Consultants' Role

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**Management consultancy as practice:  
A study of the duality of the management consultants' role**

Dissertation for: Master of Research (MRes)

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## Abstract

The central question addressed in this research is: “How do practising management consultants cope with the duality of their role?” Management consultants are often responsible for internal business leadership roles as well as developing business, people and knowledge alongside client delivery (Richter et al., 2008). The research sought to understand the nature of the potentially conflicting demands of their client-facing and consultancy-facing roles on management consultants, how conflicts arise and how they are managed.

The substantive aim was to build on and extend existing studies of duality and bring a new perspective to academic knowledge relating to management consultancy. Data collection was through semi-structured interviews, observations and a limited number of documents. Grounded analysis was used to construct the data and develop a framework linking data categories and themes to existing theory. The research found that the main conflict between the consultancy-facing and client-facing demands on management consultants centred on the requirement for the physical presence of the management consultant and the incompatibility of performing consultancy related tasks on client site. Management consultants managed the conflict by performing consultancy related tasks in the evenings at weekends as far as possible. This resulted in further conflicts with achieving a work-life balance and the demands of family.

The research focused on a practice within a single mainstream global consultancy and findings cannot therefore be generalised to other management consultancies (Tsang, 2014). However, the findings may provide the basis for further research across a range of management consultancies (Kanter, 1977 cited in Bryman and Bell, 2015).

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# Chapter 1: Aims and Objectives

## 1.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a definition of management consultancy and highlights the dichotomy of views on management consultancy presented in academic literature. The chapter sets out the research focus and locates this within existing theory relating to management consultancy, setting out clear aims and objectives and reasons why the research is important.

## 1.2 What is management consultancy?

The Management Consulting Association (MCA) defines management consultancy as: “the practice of creating value for organisations, through improved performance, achieved by providing objective advice and implementing business solutions. Management consultants help take organisations further than they would go on their own. They do this by solving problems, providing outside perspective and enhancing business capability.” (Management Consulting Association, n.d.). There is however a dichotomy between this somewhat positive, outward focused view of management consultancy and views expressed in some academic literature that describe management consultants as opportunists, lacking objectivity and only interested in securing the next piece of work (Bloch, 1999), or lacking innovation, selling mainly re-packaged solutions (Blunsdon, 2002). Others see management consultants as legitimisers, only there to strengthen the client’s argument (Sturdy et al., 2009). Consulting methods are often described as fads and fashions supported by buzzwords, the products of discourse encouraged by management consultants themselves (Jung and Kieser, 2012). In contrast to views that criticise consultants for abusing their dominant position and taking advantage of clients (Bloch, 1999), Kakabadse et al. (2006) argue that business consultants show a high degree of professionalism and humility. They

found that consultants share a common goal of moving clients forward and helping them to solve organisational issues. They also claim that whilst consultants are always aware that their primary purpose is billable hours for their consultancy, clients' needs are placed above all else and helping them is perceived to be the ultimate objective. The study found that consultants are conscious of the amount of control and discretion that is passed on to them by clients and recognise that criticisms of their role can at times be justified

### 1.3 Research focus

Czarniawska and Mazza (2012) apply constructivism to the analysis of management consulting. They reject the more radical constructivist views of Luhmann (2005, cited in Czarniawska and Mazza, 2012). Luhmann's contribution to the constructivist approach was his theory of social systems built around the concept of autopoiesis i.e. a social system capable of constructing and reconstructing itself. Luhmann saw this as "neither persons nor actions but as communicative events" (Luhmann, 2005 cited in Czarniawska and Mazza, 2012, p. 431). Luhmann proposed that consultants cannot communicate successfully with their clients and no common reality is possible.

Czarniawska and Mazza (2012) draw instead on moderate constructivist perspectives that use the metaphor of 'merchants of meaning' to describe consultants. In this perspective consultants contribute to sense-making activity by offering models and reports to reconstruct managerial tasks and roles by "reframing them with the help of linguistic artefacts and interpretative templates as sense-making tools" (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1990 cited in Czarniawska and Mazza, 2012, p. 434). This perspective aligns to the consultancy-facing role of the management consultant, developing knowledge and methods to support future client delivery.



The approaches within the moderate constructivist domain all share the view that the consultant–client interaction is a special type of interaction, “a willingly accepted illusion of a common reality, a common language and a shared meaning that can accomplish a great deal in pragmatic terms” (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2012, p. 437). This perspective aligns to the external, client-facing role of the management consultant and the relationship with the client

The final perspective is one of potential conflict between the consultancy-facing and client-facing roles of the management consultant. Management consultants are often responsible for internal business leadership roles as well as developing business, people and knowledge alongside client delivery (Richter et al., 2008). The Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.) describes duality as the state of combining two different things and may be used to describe the potentially conflicting demands of the management consultants’ consultancy-facing and client-facing roles. This state of duality is in some respects similar to that of an insider action researcher where “the researcher holds an ongoing work role and power relationships associated with the work role as well as the action research role” (Holian and Coghlan, 2013, p. 399). It is this duality of the management consultants’ role that is the specific focus of the research. This third perspective is needed as a means of drawing the consultancy-facing and client-facing roles of the management consultant together and examining how management consultancy as practice unfolds.

## 1.4 Research question and objectives

The central research question is:

**How do practicing management consultants cope with the duality of their role?**

The substantive aim of the research is to contribute to existing academic knowledge of management consultancy by gaining an understanding of the nature of the internal and

external demands on management consultants. The specific objectives of the research are to explore:

- How do conflicts arise and how are they managed?
- How does the dual role drive the use of specific skills and behaviours?
- How do management consultants reconcile ethical issues when managing the conflicting demands of internal work and client delivery?

The theoretical aim of the research is to develop a framework of internal and external demands on management consultants designed to provide answers to the research question and objectives and to identify any other factors that may be important. The framework will enable the day-to-day experiences of management consultants to be overlaid to understand how conflicts arise, the nature of these conflicts, the impact on skills and behaviours, the ethical issues and how these link to and elaborate on existing theory.

The methodological aim is to adopt a social constructionist approach for the design of a small scale qualitative investigation that will gather data through observation; ad-hoc accounts, a small number of semi-structured interviews and supporting documents.

### 1.5 Why is the research important?

The duality of the management consultants' consultancy-facing and client-facing roles has not been fully explored in academic literature relating to management consultancy. Duality has been the subject of research in the fields of: change and innovation (Farjoun, 2010); dual identities of self as designer and evaluator in organisational design (Keister and Paranjpey, 2012) and psychiatric ethics (Robertson and Walter, 2008). Early indications are that there is an opportunity to build on and extend this work into a study of the duality of the consultancy-facing and client-facing roles of the management consultant. This will bring a new perspective to academic knowledge relating to management consultancy.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the literature relating to management consultancy is reviewed from the three broad perspectives identified in chapter 1. First, the constructivist perspective of “client interaction” (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2012, p. 437) which aligns to the management consultants’ client-facing role. This perspective examines the occupational identity of the consultant, the client relationship and how management consultancy is perceived as a profession. Second is the constructivist perspective of management consultants as “meaning makers” (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1990, cited in Czarniawska and Mazza, 2012, p. 434) which aligns to the consultancy-facing role of the management consultant. This perspective examines the role of knowledge in management consultancy and reviews previous studies focused on the use of consulting methods and service offers. This perspective also considers the identity of the consultant and their support networks. The final perspective is the research focus which examines the state of duality.

The figure below shows these perspectives and locates the research within a framework of existing theory to be reviewed. The research focus is on the management consultant and the duality of their consultancy-facing and client-facing roles:

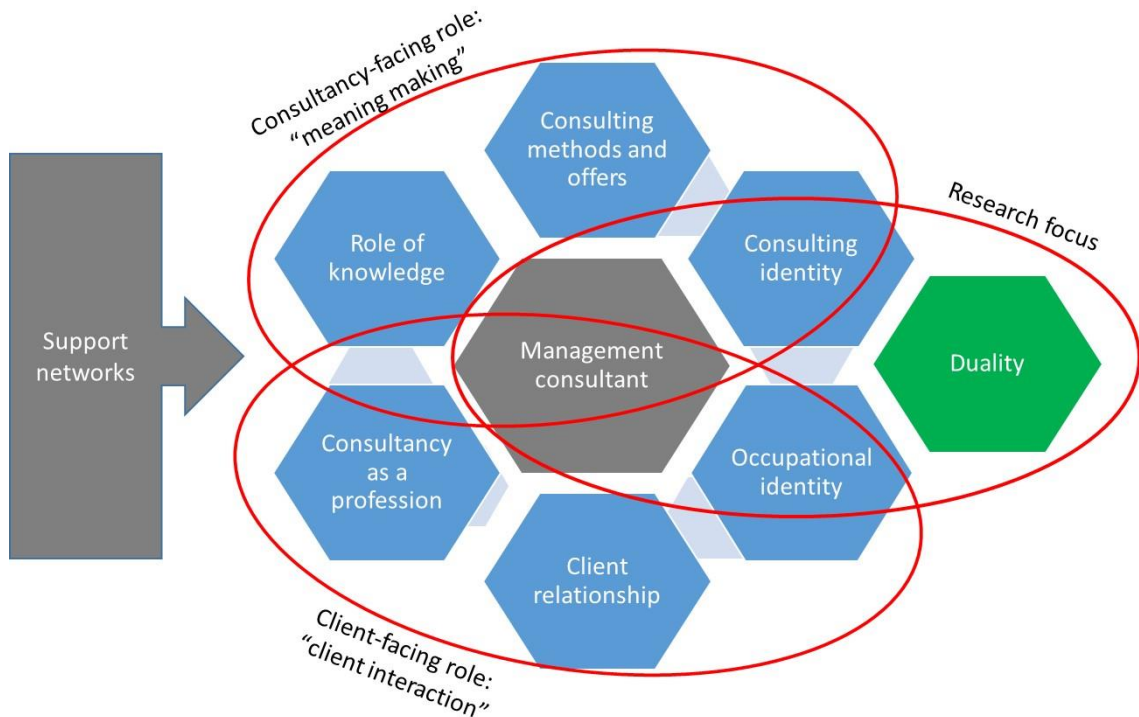


Figure 1: Research Focus

## 2.2 Client-facing role: client interaction

### 2.2.1 Occupational identity

The literature tends to focus on the use of rhetoric as a means of regulating and managing occupational identity with the client and the difficulties associated with this. Management consultants are often referred to as “knowledge workers” (Alvesson, 2001, p. 864; Costas and Kärreman, 2016, p. 62). Knowledge-intensive work is sometimes “ambiguity-intensive” (Alvesson, 2001, p. 883) and it can be difficult to demonstrate competence and performance. There may be occasions when the ability to deal with rhetoric, regulate images and manage relationships and interactions with clients is central to securing and regulating occupational identity (Alvesson, 2001). However, there are risks in relying on rhetoric, especially the 'high-impact' rhetoric (Wright and Kitay, 2002, p. 271) often used among large consulting firms emphasising the measurable, bottom-line results of

consulting interventions. This may raise client expectations leaving consultants with the dilemma of how to successfully manage client perceptions of consulting success in terms of benefits that may take years to realise (Wright and Kitay, 2002).

Kitay and Wright (2007) cite three structural constraints for consultancy as an occupation: Legitimacy, due to a lack a clearly articulated professional status; Efficiency, as consultants must undertake work for clients as well as their consultancy resulting in long hours and a frantic work pace; Vulnerability, as client expenditure on consultants is discretionary and although in the short term it may be cheaper to hire a consultant with a specific skillset this can then be brought in-house. In response to these constraints, they construct five consulting roles: “professional”; “prophet”; “business person”; “partner” and “service worker” (Kitay and Wright, 2007, p. 1627). These roles are based on rhetoric and whereas they may be useful in constructing occupational identity, their effectiveness in addressing structural constraints is unclear.

#### 2.2.2 Client relationship

Canato and Giangreco (2011) focus instead on the client relationship and define consultants based on their sources of competitive advantage as: “information sources”; “standard setters”; “knowledge brokers” and “knowledge integrators”. They also propose two ‘roles’ for management consultants: “locus of experience” and “source of legitimation” (Canato and Giangreco, 2011, p. 236). Experience is important in establishing trust with the client and a key driver of competitiveness in consulting is neither price nor measurable quality but experience-based trust (Gluckler and Armbruster, 2003). The main value of consulting firms is their workforce. Consultants' knowledge and professional competence are the basis of consulting and the degree of satisfaction depends mainly on the person carrying out the work (Momparker et al., 2015). There is a view that leading consulting

firms should signal quality by symbolising an image of employing an intellectual elite (Armbrüster, 2004). This may not be appropriate for consulting roles involving mundane, routine or repetitive work such as the “service worker” described by Kitay and Wright (2007, p. 1627).

The view of management consultancy as a “source of legitimation” is shared by Sturdy (2011, p. 519) who identifies the distinctive features of management consultants as their outsider relationship to the client, able to shape and legitimise ideas whilst lacking the formal responsibility and accountability of managers. Clegg et al. (2004) focus on the disruptive nature of consulting in bringing about change and sees the role of the management consultant as “parasitical, a source of ‘noise’ that disrupts established ways of doing and being by introducing interruptive action into the space between order and chaos” (Clegg et al., 2004, p. 31).

Consulting roles go well beyond legitimising clients’ views and being a source of experience. As innovators, consultants are organisational outsiders, enabling knowledge flow across organisational boundaries (Sturdy et al., 2009). In contrast, internal consultants often experience problems, struggling to introduce new ideas because of their status as organisational insiders (Sturdy and Wright, 2008). Internal consultants sometimes work collaboratively with external consultants (Sturdy and Wright, 2011). This may result in a productive consultant-client relationship provided the internal consultant has legitimacy and credibility as an internal expert with “boundary-spanning networks” (Sturdy and Wright, 2011, p. 500) that enable the consultant and client to leverage relationships that facilitate power sharing and the ability to confront challenges if things do not go exactly to plan.

Liminality is a further characteristic of the client-consultant relationship that facilitates change, “a fluid and unstructured space, where normal order is suspended and which is both unsettling and creative” (Sturdy, 2006, p. 929). The literature appears to be in general agreement that the liminality of the consultant-client relationship is a positive force, “a liminal space where normal practice and order are suspended for the consultant and the client and consultants as allies of management have new rites of passage in temporary positions of power” (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003, p. 267). Management consultants frequently find themselves in time-limited and ambiguous work positions. Borg and Soderlund, (2015) found that consultants develop higher liminality competences to manage their dynamic work conditions. At the lowest level of liminality they see “work as an assignment” and at the highest level they see “work as knowledge transfer” (Borg, and Soderlund, 2015, p. 178).

### 2.2.3 Consultancy as a profession

The literature presents opposing views on whether professionalisation of management consultancy would be a positive step forward. Consultants have failed to clearly define their occupation and the fragmented nature of consulting and the lack of agreement on consultants’ competencies are key barriers to occupational professionalism and setting out expected standards for knowledge, conduct and practice (Kubr, 2002; Kirkpatrick et al., 2012). A further barrier is that consulting knowledge is distinctive from that of other professions such as accounting or medicine, being “too esoteric, fluid and changeable to be embedded in portable, transferable, and testable credentials” (Kirkpatrick et al., 2012, p. 193).

These barriers are not insurmountable however, there are commercial pressures. Knowledge is a critical source of competitive advantage (Ambos and Schlegelmilch, 2009)

and the last thing consultants want is for knowledge to be standardised and shared. Leading consultancies have resisted efforts to professionalise and large consultancies prefer to use their own brand for differentiation purposes (McKenna, 1999 cited in Gluckler and Armbruster, 2003). They are also concerned that standard qualifications would make consultants more mobile, exacerbating the problem of retaining qualified personnel (Gluckler and Armbruster, 2003).

This failure to professionalise means that there are no binding ethical guidelines for consultancy. Anyone can call themselves a management consultant and offer services to clients without any qualifications, credentials or registration (Kubr, 2002). The simple view of consulting ethics is that the consultant should act in the client's best interests, not manipulate the client in the interests of the consultant (Kubr, 2002). However, it is not that straightforward and there are dilemmas for consultants, not least of which is: who is the client? There may be many client stakeholders with needs that are incompatible with each other and with the best interests of the client organisation (Krehmeyer and Freeman, 2012). The personal attributes of the consultant are an integral part of ethics and professionalism. This includes not only analytical ability and listening skills but also personality characteristics such as integrity, honesty and an ability to establish trust with clients (Greiner and Ennsfellner, 2010).

## **2.3 Consultancy-facing role: meaning making**

### **2.3.1 The role of knowledge**

Knowledge is generally categorised as "codified" for example, the documented, anonymised output from previous client engagements and "tacit", more ambiguous, usually undocumented, based on the expertise and experience of individuals (Teece, 1998, p. 63). Consulting firms cite the ability to manage and share knowledge as a "core capability



for achieving competitive advantage” (Dunford, 2000, p. 295). However, producing and sharing codified and tacit knowledge within firms remains a major challenge. Consultants often have insufficient time between projects for knowledge capture, unable to put the required effort into capturing the learning potential for the firm (Ambos and Schlegelmilch, 2009). However, rather than fundamental time pressure, problems may be more deeply embedded in cultures where sharing knowledge may be seen as giving away power and influence. Consultancies often address this through their appraisal and incentive processes (Dunford, 2000). Using knowledge assets may not always be of benefit for example, using codified knowledge in competitive bids may undermine competitive performance if the knowledge has not been fully understood or is not sufficiently customised to meet the clients’ needs (Haas and Hansen, 2005). A further issue is that once knowledge has been exploited it can be imitated by others, undermining the benefits of using it (Haas and Hansen, 2005).

A further consideration is the channels for knowledge sharing. These may be formal from knowledge systems or informal from individuals. Knowledge sharing is a continuum between two extremes of formal and informal knowledge sharing. There is an increasing focus on the strength of informal knowledge sharing for innovation (Taminiau et al., 2009). Some consultancies have attempted to mitigate the risks of using codified knowledge by creating a network of experts to provide codified and tacit knowledge (Powell and Ambrosini, 2012).

### 2.3.2 Consulting methods and offers

Existing theory criticises management consultancy observing a tendency for “buzzwords” and re-packaging old ideas (Jung and Kieser, 2012, p. 330). However, consultancies play a major role in the dissemination and adaptation of management fashions such as: Total

Quality Management (TQM); Business Process Re-engineering (BPR) and others. Whereas this undoubtedly generates consulting business and consultants are often responsible for either starting or continuing the discourse, managers also benefit by appearing innovative whilst feeling safe in the knowledge that many others have already implemented the concept (Jung and Kieser, 2012).

There are risks, the lack of professionalisation in consultancy means there are few protections for managers when it comes to selecting appropriately qualified consultants. During the “fashion boom” of Total Quality Management (TQM) many generalist consultants entered the field, implementations were often technically weak and expected benefits were not realised. When TQM discourse moved out of the major management publications followed shortly afterwards by “fashion bust” the hype was over and TQM returned to its technical roots (David and Strang, 2006, p. 216).

Consulting dynamics are “structurally prone to amplify rather than dampen the faddishness of the business community” (David and Strang, 2006, p. 231). However, consultancies do not always follow management fashion trends unless it is commercially viable to do so. Whittle (2008, p528) uses the metaphor of “bandwagon” to examine the diffusion of fashionable ideas and questions the idea that consultants always ‘jump on’ to fashion bandwagons. She found that consultants often re-interpret and re-articulate the discourse in line with their own agenda by ‘riding alongside’ the bandwagon, superficially engaging with the discourse and ‘cashing in’ on the new income opportunities without making any real change to existing service offers (Whittle, 2008, p. 528).

### 2.3.3 Consulting identity

Richter et al. (2008) identify two organisational archetypes in consulting: professional partnerships and managed professional businesses. The professional partnership model is

associated with McKinsey & Company, Boston Consulting Group, and others. The managed professional business model is associated with firms entering the consulting market from adjacent industries such as accounting, auditing and technology. There are differences in human resource management practices between these models but also some similarities as the nature of the work undertaken by consultants is similar. The main differences with managed professional businesses are increased formality, the preference for strong commercial or technological skills over general skills and “grow or go” principles are less strictly enforced if utilisation is high (Richter et al., 2008, p. 194).

Irrespective of the organisational archetype, consultants are expected to assume an “ideal worker image” devoted to work ahead of family and personal needs (Reid, 2015, p. 1002). Control in organisations is not only achieved by designing and applying appropriate structures, procedures, measures and targets (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). The nature of consultancy means that control may be accomplished through the self-positioning of employees within managerially inspired discourses with which they become identified and committed. It is not uncommon for management consultancies to actively define the employee as elite and use this shared social identity to promote self-discipline and the desire to accomplish high standards of performance. This may also attract and retain consultants and create an image that appeals to the market (Alvesson and Robertson, 2006). This elite identity may cause status anxiety for consultants who find themselves under pressure to consistently achieve high standards and the potential loss of that status if they fail to do so (Gill, 2015).

An elite consulting identity may not always live up to expectations. Consultancy work in large knowledge-intensive firms often entails the use of standardised methodologies and implementations and far from finding the work creative, innovative and complex,

individuals may find it boring. Consultancy firms employ highly qualified individuals and emphasise creativity, innovation, autonomy, learning and development in relation to work. As a result, consultants develop a “bored self” (Costas and Kärreman, 2016, p. 62). The construction of self as bored allows consultants to maintain their aspirations. Costas and Kärreman (2016, p. 75) describe this phenomenon as an “arrested identity”.

Consultancies do not rely entirely on managerially inspired discourses and elite social identity to achieve high standards. Performance evaluation systems are also used to control identity. Reid (2015) found that those who embraced expected consulting identity by being available at all times and in all places received good performance ratings whereas those who placed restrictions on their work e.g. client locations, types of project and availability, were generally penalised and received poorer performance ratings.

Expected consulting identity means working long, non-standard working hours, without taking into account the consequences of gender differentiation (Ford and Collinson, 2011). Employment legislation in the UK provides employees with the right to request changes to their working patterns, subject to business need. Many consultancies actively promote flexible working arrangements as recruitment and retention tools however, the take up tends to be gendered, mainly women with young children (Donnelly, 2015). The consultancy business model relies on consultants working long hours and Donnelly (2015) found that the nature of flexibility centred on enabling individuals to work around the demands of family rather than working fewer hours.

## 2.4 Support Networks

Trust is a feature of consultancy, not only the trust between client and consultant (Gluckler and Armbruster, 2003) but also the trust the consultant places in their consultancy. “High trust organisations” create a culture in which relationships are important and showing care

and concern for the other person's needs is valued. (Six and Sorge, 2008, p. 857). This is important for consultants who spend long hours on client site, sometimes with sceptical client personnel, under pressure to achieve high standards and deliver high quality work (Alvesson and Robertson, 2006). Another important aspect of high trust organisations for consultants is having mechanisms to manage match and develop their professional competencies to support career progression (Six and Sorge, 2008).

Social identity is a further potential source of support for consultants. The pressure to excel, sell-on and show full-time availability makes management consultancy an extreme example of a high-status, high-stress occupation. Consultants' social identity as high-performing professionals and self-categorisation as a member of a social group may help to cope with stress and create a feeling of social inclusion (Mühlhaus and Bouwmeester, 2016).

In addition to relationships, development and a sense of identity, consultants also require practical support (Orlikowski, 2007). Consultancy is a very mobile occupation and relies heavily on technology for remote working at home or on client site. Orlikowski (2007) found that mobile technology has significantly changed ways of working, blurring the line between personal and business interactions and "altering expectations of availability and accountability, redefining the boundaries of the workday, and extending and intensifying interactions within the communication network" (Orlikowski, 2007, p. 1444). Whereas technology support is vital, development of technology has made consultants even more accessible and less able to control the line between personal and business.

## 2.5 Duality

Management consultants are primarily rewarded for billable hours (Ambos and Schlegelmilch, 2009; Kakabadse et al., 2006; Richter et al., 2008). However, they must also

contribute to knowledge and innovation, develop new business, ensure their own training and self-development targets are met, participate in recruitment activities, take responsibility for the development and appraisal of more junior consultants and contribute to practice leadership (Richter et al., 2008). The consultancy-facing role of the management consultant may therefore be significant. Duality has been the subject of research in consultancy but this has been very limited. Keister and Paranjpey (2012) identify two distinct ways for organisational design consultants to utilise self as an instrument through the dual consulting identities of designer and evaluator and examine duality from a philosophical perspective rather than a practical one. Borg and Soderlund (2015) cite the duality of the work of consultants where, at the same time as performing work in the client firm, they must contribute to the work of their consultancy. However, the focus of this research is liminality rather than duality. Farjoun (2010) examines the duality of companies remaining innovative, flexible and responsive to change whilst performing reliably and consistently. The focus here is very much on companies rather than individuals. There is also an emerging trend for managers to be more change focused, externally oriented and advisory in style and able to take on the dual role of manager and change consultant (Sturdy et al., 2016). The dual role here is within one organisation and lacks the potential conflict of power relationships between the management consultants' client-facing and the consultancy-facing roles. In the field of psychiatry the ethical issues that may arise from a dual role are illustrated by the potential conflict between psychiatrists' obligations to act in their patients' best interests and obligations to the community as a whole (Robertson and Walter 2008). There may be some parallels to be drawn with ethical issues facing consultants.

## 2.6 Summary

In this chapter, existing literature on management consultancy was reviewed from three broad perspectives. Management consultancy is a well-researched topic and there is a wealth of existing literature on the client-facing and consultancy-facing roles of the management consultant. However, whereas existing theory provided some insights into duality, it does not fully capture the potential conflict between the management consultants' consultancy-facing and client-facing roles. The next chapter outlines methods of data collection, the instruments used and how the data was analysed.

## Chapter 3: Methods of data collection

### 3.1 Introduction

The theoretical aim of the research was to develop a framework of internal and external demands on management consultants designed to meet the research aim and objectives and to identify any other factors that may be important. This chapter outlines the research design to meet this aim. This includes the methods for data collection and analysis and the theoretical rationale for selection. The chapter also sets out ethical considerations and the steps taken to ensure the study achieves high ethical standards. The reflexivity of the researcher and its importance was also considered.

### 3.2 Research Design

#### 3.2.1 Approach

The foreshadowed research problem (Malinowski 1922, cited in Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 21) was substantive but relatively undeveloped focusing on the impact of the duality of the management consultants' consultancy-facing and client-facing roles in terms of the conflicts that arise, how these are managed and how this drives specific skills. Context was also important: when and where does internal work take place, the amount of time spent on internal work and how ethical dilemmas are reconciled. Positivist research designs such as surveys amongst large numbers of management consultants were unlikely to be effective as there were no pre-conceived hypotheses or assumptions to test (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Any measurable terms defined for example, the number of minutes spent on internal work each day, would be meaningless unless it was also possible to understand how those minutes were experienced by the management consultant and what other demands were being made at the time.



The research was an inductive, collaborative exercise where data were gathered and interpreted with the aim of constructing new theory or elaborating existing theory. A social constructionist paradigm was indicated (Stainton-Rogers, 2006). The research was exploratory, seeking to understand and gain insight. Qualitative methods were adopted through “ethnographic style” observation (Easterby-Smith et al, 2015, p.86). Observation was important as “it is not unusual for persons to say they are doing one thing but in reality, they are doing something else. The only way to know this is through observation” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 31). Unstructured face to face interviews were conducted approximately two weeks after the observations to clarify and build on initial findings and address any gaps. Non-verbal behaviours are easily misinterpreted and the interviews were also an opportunity to clarify what had been observed and ensure there were no misunderstandings (Patton, 2002, cited in Corbin and Strauss, 2008).

### 3.2.2 Research Setting

The focus of the research was a consultancy practice specialising in customer experience and analytics within a single mainstream consultancy. There is some debate on the external validity of case studies when it comes to empirical generalisation within a population. One view is that case studies may have merits in terms of theoretical generalisation but it is unlikely that a new theory can be developed from a single case (Tsang, 2014). In contrast, Kanter (1977, cited in Bryman and Bell, 2015) shows that it is possible to generate concepts from a single case that may then be tested in other organisations. When assessing the quality of research, validity, reliability and replicability are inappropriate for qualitative research (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Hammersley (2007) interprets validity as credibility, requiring evidence and plausibility and proposes relevance as a criterion in terms of the importance of the topic or contribution to literature. Steps were taken to ensure that claims were both plausible and supported by the data. The research focus was considered

relevant by the selected consultancy and the substantive aim of the research is to make a relevant contribution to existing literature on management consultancy.

### 3.2.3 Data collection and analysis

The aim was to formulate a “Day in the Life of” view of a management consultant through observation and semi-structured interviews. The focus was the duality of the consultants’ consultancy-facing and client-facing roles. The setting was dictated by the demands on the consultant, all settings were relevant as they could generate the use of different skills, behaviours and issues. Data were in the form of field notes from observations, transcripts of interviews, the reflexive notes of the researcher and relevant documents that emerged during the research. The data were semi-structured and the collection and analysis process was cyclical rather than linear as the distinction between data creation and data analysis in qualitative research is not clear-cut (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015).

In selecting the most appropriate approach to analysing data, content analysis was rejected as it tends to support positivist research designs that assume a clear distinction between data collection and analysis (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Discourse analysis was similarly discounted. Discourse analysis operates on texts in the form of documents and transcripts. Analysing rich data that includes observations may have proved challenging other than as part of a mixed methods approach (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 2010).

The theoretical aim of the research was to develop a framework of internal and external demands on management consultants to understand what conflicts exist, the nature of these conflicts, the impact on skills and behaviours, the ethical considerations and to link these to and elaborate on existing theory. The most appropriate approach appeared to be grounded analysis. The aim of grounded analysis is the generation and elaboration of theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967 cited in Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). The figure

below outlines the analytical journey from detailed codes and categories through to higher level themes and concepts and linking this to existing theory or generating new theory.



Figure 2: Codes to Theory Model for Grounded Analysis  
adapted from Easterby-Smith et al. (2015)

The use of a qualitative research analysis software programme such as NVivo was considered but rejected as the volume of data to be analysed manually was considered manageable within the timescale.

### 3.3 Ethical considerations

#### 3.3.1 Approach

When negotiating access, care was taken to be completely open and transparent about the research focus, aims and objectives, methods and how the outputs will be disseminated. The research was overt and the management consultants and their practice lead were fully briefed beforehand and able to play their part in ensuring the research successfully met its aims and objectives.

The management consultants nominated to participate in the research were provided with sufficient information to give informed consent. The researcher ensured that the participants read and fully understood the information leaflet in Appendix 1 and signed the consent form in Appendix 2 before the initial observation started. The consent form and information leaflet made it clear that participation was voluntary and participants had the right to withdraw at any stage up to the point where the data provided had been processed and might no longer be extracted. These documents also fulfilled what Lofland et al. (2006, cited in Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 32) states as “one of the central obligations that field

researchers have with respect to those they study". That is the guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity and the promise that real names will not be used and will be substituted by pseudonyms in the research report.

The research may highlight aspects that could harm the organisation and the individuals within it. There is an ethical responsibility not to publicise or circulate information that is likely to harm the interests of individual informants. One option is to send a draft of the findings to the organisation asking them to confirm that there are no problems. The risk is that the organisation may censor and even prevent publication (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). The agreement the researcher has is that key findings will be presented to practice leads. It will be important that any negative findings are handled sensitively.

### 3.3.2 Reflexivity

"Objectivity in qualitative research is a myth" (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 33). Researchers bring their particular paradigms to the research situation including perspectives, training, knowledge and biases. These aspects of self then become woven into all aspects of the research process (Guba and Lincoln, 1998 cited in Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Reflexivity is commonly used in qualitative research and has been accepted as a method qualitative researchers can and should use to legitimise, validate, and question research practices and representations (Pillow, 2003). The question then becomes how to use experience, which offers potentially deeper understanding of the phenomenon, whilst not imposing the researcher's experience on participants (Berger, 2013).

The researcher was previously a management consultant with the organisation that is the subject of the research and found it relatively easy to build rapport with the research participants. Avoiding over-rapport and managing marginality was more challenging. Marginality is a difficult position to maintain for any researcher "because it engenders a

continual sense of insecurity” (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p. 89). “Ethnographers must strenuously avoid feeling at home. If and when all sense of being a stranger is lost one may have allowed the escape of one’s critical, analytical perspective” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 90).

A further consideration, relevant to the researcher’s position as an ex-management consultant, is that there are distinct differences but some similarities between consulting and researching. Management consultancy is concerned with providing objective advice (Management Consulting Association, n.d.) whereas “objectivity in qualitative research is a myth” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 33). In answering the question: “Is it possible to be a constructionist consultant?” Czarniawska (2001, p. 256) identified three logics: “logic of representation”, conventionally used between researchers and managers, based on rhetoric; “logic of practice”, constructionist as it creates and re-creates its own rules with each instance of its use and “logic of theory”, abstract, claims to use formal logic and has truth as methodological criteria. Czarniawska believes the traditional role of a consultant is to engage in the logic of practice, helping to develop practice without ever stating it explicitly. However, the constructionist consultant would have to do the opposite and explicitly formulate the logic of practice in the hope of provoking reflection to further its development and legitimisation. Czarniawska believes that “managers learn by imitating and through practice and there is no room for constructionist consulting” (Czarniawska 2001, p. 264). This does not take account of the role of the consultant in working collaboratively with the client to transfer knowledge at the end of the engagement. There are also many consulting engagements where the consultant, whilst providing expert input, is also learning from the client (Hicks et al., 2009).

### 3.4 Summary

This chapter has provided an outline of the research design and the rationale for selecting the methodology and methods involved. The chapter also discussed ethical considerations, the steps taken to ensure high standards were achieved and opened the discussion on the reflexivity of the researcher. The next chapter outlines the process of constructing and analysing the data.

## Chapter 4: Collecting and analysing the data

### 4.1 Introduction

The methodological aim is to adopt a social constructionist approach for the design of a small scale qualitative investigation that will gather data through observation; ad-hoc accounts, a small number of semi-structured interviews and supporting documents. This chapter describes in detail the approach to collecting the data and the instruments used. The chapter provides the organisational context for the research and goes on to describe the approach to analysing the data. The output of the analysis is presented as an analytical framework showing data categories and themes and how these align to existing theory. The detailed analysis including codes and sub-categories is included as Appendix 5.

### 4.2 Selection of participants

The research participants, referred to throughout as May and June, were nominated by the practice lead. Both are experienced consultants having been with the consultancy for approximately ten years. June is a managing consultant who originally entered through the graduate training programme. June has ambitions to progress beyond her current managing consultant grade. May is a senior consultant who originally transferred from an administrative role within the consultancy. May has a young daughter having returned from maternity leave the previous year. The grade structure within the consultancy from high to low is: Vice President; Principal; Managing Consultant; Senior Consultant; Consultant and Associate Consultant.

### 4.3 Data collection

Multiple instruments were employed to support the research:

- observations where the researcher adopted the role of observer as participant, i.e. the researcher observed the activities of the context actors with them being aware of the researcher's presence (Bryman and Bell, 2015).
- semi-structured interviews based on a topic guide (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015) comprising level 1 (introductory) and level 2 (probing) questions. The researcher asked open ended questions supplemented by requests to elaborate answers with examples and recollections of experiences. Probing questions were used to elicit responses for more difficult aspects. Structural questions were used to transition between topics (Qu and Dumay, 2011).
- supporting documents were reviewed to provide context:
  - Performance scorecard
  - Practice organisation chart

#### 4.3.1 Observations

May and June were both engaged on a project to implement changes for a banking client to comply with the regulatory requirements of the banking regulator. The project was highly confidential and subject to a non-disclosure agreement. Access to client site for research purposes was not therefore possible. Observation instead took place at the offices of the management consultancy on three separate Fridays, two full days and one-half day, a total of twenty hours. It is common practice for consultants to work from their base office on Friday's when project commitments permit. In addition to general observation within the work environment, observations included a variety of activities:

- Desk work on client related tasks and internal work commitments
  - Counselling sessions with counselees of the consultants being observed.
- Counsellors are responsible for the career development and performance appraisal



of their counselees and meetings by telephone or face to face usually take place monthly.

- Agreeing a mid-project appraisal with a team member for their mid-year review.
- Observing a group exercise as part of an assessment centre to recruit new consultants and a first stage telephone interview with a potential recruit.
- Telephone conference with a working group on staff retention in preparation for a presentation of progress and findings to the sponsoring vice president
- Telephone conference relating to group work in preparation for a training course the following week
- Ad-hoc accounts from consultants wishing to express views on the conflicting demands of the consultants' consultancy-facing and client-facing roles.
- Accompanying research participants on housekeeping visits to Technology Support, encounters with practice and sector leads, getting coffee and getting lunch.

Field notes and reflexive notes of the researcher were manually captured throughout the observations and transcribed by the researcher at the end of each day. Field notes were used to formulate a "Day in the Life of a Management Consultant" included as Appendix 4.

#### 4.3.2 Semi-structured interviews

The two consultants nominated for observation were also interviewed. The interviews were conducted face to face at the offices of the management consultancy and audio recorded. The interviews focused on the personal and professional views of the consultants using an interview topic guide, included as Appendix 3. The recordings were transcribed verbatim using a professional transcription service and then anonymised by the researcher.

#### 4.3.3 Supporting documents

Two key documents were used for context. First, the organisation chart for the practice showing the relationship with centres of excellence and location of the informants within the consultancy structure, see figure 3 below. Second was the performance scorecard. This is used as the consultants' development record and in their annual appraisal. It was used by the researcher to understand the range of targets and standards assessed as part of consultants' performance appraisal.

### 4.4 Organisational context

#### 4.4.1 Practice organisation

The practice organisation in Figure 3 below and the explanation provided by the participants as to how it operates in practice provides context for the research:

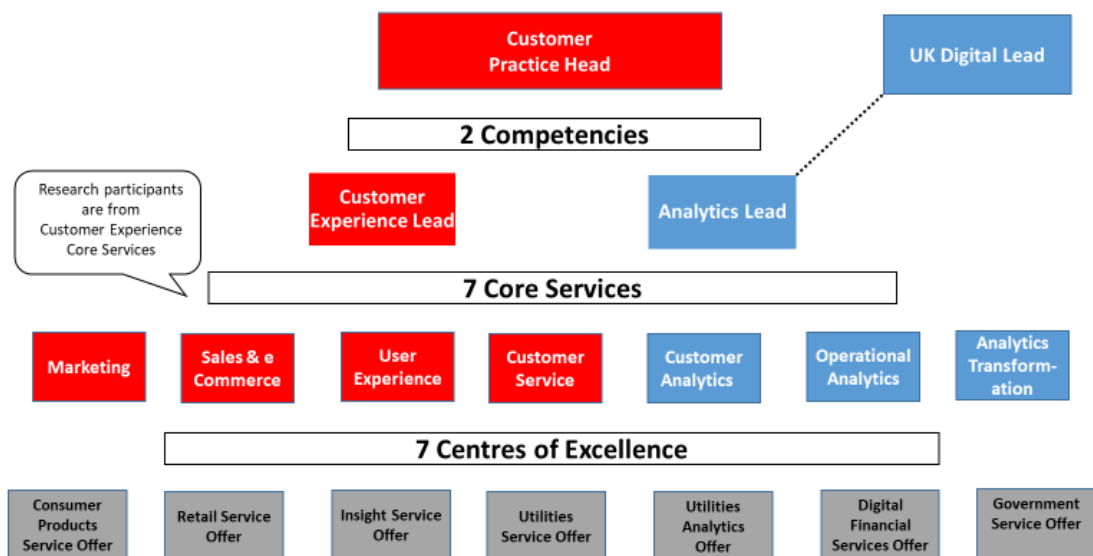


Figure 3: Consultancy Practice Organisation

The practice is one of four within the management consultancy each with a headcount of approximately two hundred. The Practice Head is a senior vice president and the practice operates as two separate but complementary competencies: customer experience and analytics each lead by a vice president. The Analytics Lead also has “dotted line”

accountability to the UK Digital Lead. There are seven core service teams each led by a principal, four aligned to customer experience and three aligned to analytics. Consultants sit within the core services. Associate consultants are in the graduate trainee programme but also align to practices and transfer to a core service once they are promoted to consultant on successful completion of their two-year training programme. In addition to practices there are also sector specific teams focused on business development. The seven centres of excellence represent the practice working with sector specialists to develop service offers to take to potential clients. Each centre of excellence is led by a principal or vice president. In addition to leading core services and centres of excellence principals and vice presidents also undertake people-related practice roles such as recruitment lead and people champion, responsible for liaising with human resource management and overseeing staff development, training and appraisal. There is also an operational lead, a principal responsible for the day-to-day operations of the practice. Vice presidents may also be the consulting lead on a key, often global, client account.

#### 4.4.2 Targets

All levels of consultant from associate consultant to vice president have billable utilisation targets i.e. they must earn fees from client delivery. The target differs according to level but not usually within level, to reflect other responsibilities. Indicative billable utilisation targets are: vice president 25%, principal 50%, management consultant 75%, senior consultants and consultants 80%. Associate consultants have a slightly lower billable utilisation target of 75% as they are expected to be involved in more internal work. Vice presidents and principles have sales targets for new business, managing consultants have a “soft” sales target that may be achieved by selling on either a new phase or new project to their existing client.

In addition to sales targets at higher consultant levels and billable utilisation targets, all consultants are expected to engage in internal work in two areas. The first is “Growth”, this includes: providing input for or leading sales bids for new business; developing specialist knowledge for capability training; leading or contributing to the development of service offers aligned to centres of excellence; producing codified knowledge developed from client engagements; writing blogs and developing specialist sector related content. The second area is “Talent” this includes: getting involved in recruitment at all stages from initial screening, telephone or face to face interviewing and assessment centres; involvement in initiatives to retain and develop staff; supporting mid-year review and end of year performance appraisal. Senior consultant level and above take on the role of counsellor to up to three counselees from the next grade down. This is a people management role, the counsellor is responsible for the management, development and performance appraisal of their counselees, resolving issues, helping to ensure project roles are appropriate, providing guidance, supporting promotion cases, etc. This operates as a tree structure for escalation purposes so at the highest-level a vice president may well be responsible for three principals; nine management consultants; twenty-seven senior consultants and so on, although not everyone has the full complement of three counselees. Other internal work might include: running team meetings; organising team events; helping with corporate events and organising annual consultancy kick-off meetings. All consultants also have mandatory administration tasks included maintaining their curriculum vitae in a prescribed format for resourcing purposes, time card and forecasts and timely submission of expense claims.

## 4.5 Analysing the data

Grounded analysis (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015; Gioia et al., 2012) was used to analyse the data contained in field notes, transcriptions of interviews and supporting documents. This involved a four-stage process. First, the data from the interviews and field notes were reviewed line by line and coded. Second, codes were grouped into categories, introducing sub-categories where necessary to make the categories easier to manage. Third, the categories were grouped into themes relating to the different types of demands. At this fourth stage it was possible to identify where categories and sub categories needed to be consolidated to support themes and concepts and aligning these to theory.

## 4.6 Analytical framework

The full analysis including sub-categories and codes is included as Appendix 5. A summarised version of the framework showing categories and themes linked to theory is shown in figure 4 below:

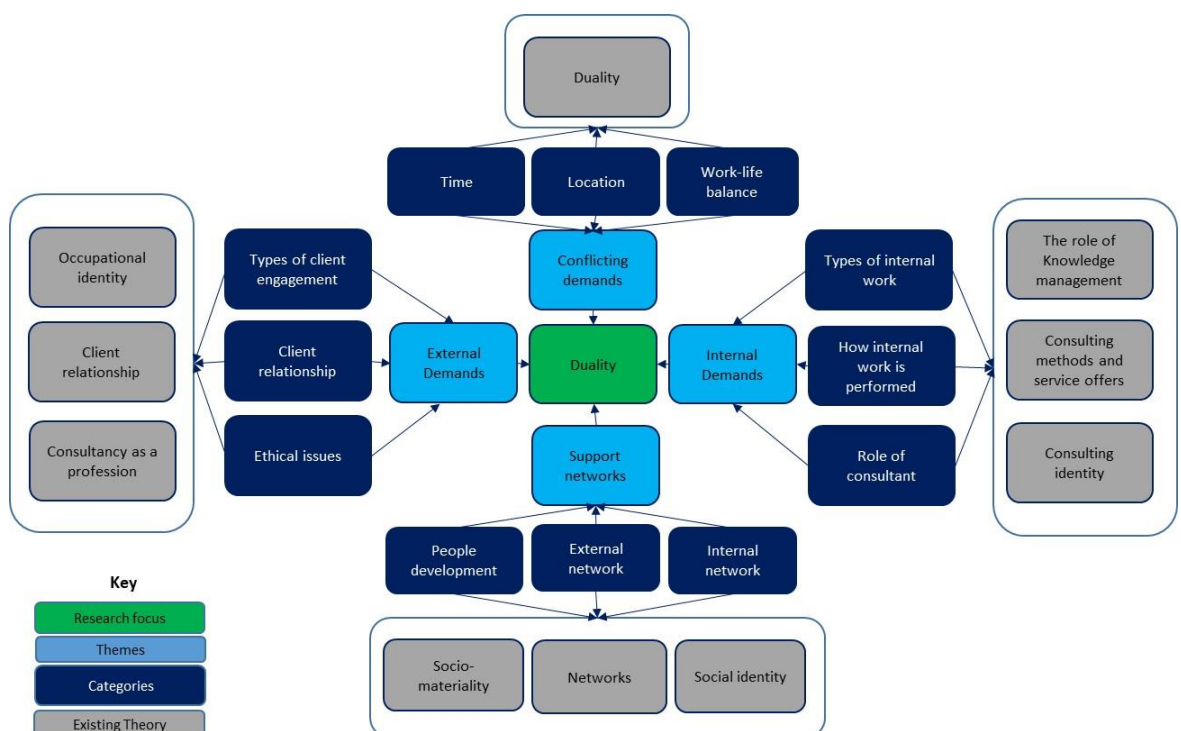


Figure 4: Analytical Framework

Four themes were identified: first, the external demands on consultants from client work. Theory relating to occupational identity, the client relationship and consultancy as a profession linked very easily to data relating to the client engagement undertaken by research participants, the relationship with the client and ethical issues. Second, the internal demands on consultants. It was possible to link theory on the role of knowledge in consultancy, consulting methods and service offers and consulting identity to data relating to the specific types of internal work, how internal work is performed and the role of the consultant. The internal and external demands on consultants are only part of the picture. The support networks consultants draw on to enable them to fulfil their consultancy-facing and client-facing roles were identified as an important theme. This aspect linked to theory on networks and building high trust organisations, social identity and socio-materiality. Finally, further analysis identified a theme of conflicting demands relating to time, physical presence and work-life balance. This then links to the research focus of duality and existing theory relating to the duality of the management consultants' role.

#### 4.7 Summary

In this chapter, the approach to data collection and the instruments used were described in detail and the organisational context for the research provided. The chapter also set out the approach to analysing the data using grounded analysis to construct themes and link these to existing theory (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015; Gioia et al., 2012). The output of the analysis was presented as an analytical framework showing data categories, themes and how these align to existing theory. The detailed output of the analysis including codes and sub-categories is included as Appendix 5. This is interpreted and discussed in relation to existing theory in the next chapter.

## Chapter 5: Interpreting the data

### 5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter described the approach to data collection and analysis and presented the output as an analytical framework based on grounded analysis (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015; Gioia et al., 2012). In this chapter, the analytical framework is reviewed theme by theme and interpreted in the context of the existing academic theory relating to management consultancy reviewed in Chapter 2: Literature Review. The chapter draws on interview data and data from field notes and reflexive notes, brought to life in the form of a “Day in the life of a management consultant” included as Appendix 4.

### 5.2 External demands

The theme of external demands was constructed from data on the client engagement, the relationship with the client and ethical issues. The theme relates directly to existing theory on occupational identity, client relationship and consultancy as a profession.

May and June both expressed a preference for longer projects of say six months or more involving what June described as: “delivering something rather than handing over our recommendations and walking away”. At the time of the investigation their in-flight project had been running for a year. June described the client engagement as “embedded in the content as well as project management”. In addition to the regulatory content June was pleased to be able to “add value by applying specialist customer experience knowledge” which she said was beyond the original brief. The difficulties of “knowledge workers ” (Alvesson, 2001, p. 864; Costas and Kärreman, 2016, p. 62) demonstrating competence and performance do not appear to be relevant in this case. June described measuring performance by producing a weekly dashboard, jointly developed with the client, showing the progress of work streams and issue resolution against the agreed plan.

In terms of competence, June described going beyond the client's brief by using her expertise to overlay regulatory content with an improved customer experience. In contrast to existing theory relating to occupational identity, there does not appear to be any need here to depend on rhetoric to regulate the consultants' identity (Alvesson, 2001; Kitay and Wright, 2007). Rather, consultants were working collaboratively with the client in a joint team and appear to be fulfilling the role of partner (Sturdy and Wright, 2011).

June said that her UK based team was working with colleagues from France who had previously delivered a similar project. The consultants, in addition to structure, project management and specialist customer experience expertise, were also bringing knowledge and experience of regulation to the engagement. Consultants as a "locus of experience" (Canato and Giangreco, 2011, p. 236) is therefore appropriate. June felt that a good working relationship had been established with her client. Indeed, the client was keen for her to continue in the more senior role of engagement lead. This is a possible indicator of experience-based trust (Gluckler and Armbruster, 2003) and that the degree of satisfaction generated very much depends on the person carrying out the work (Momparker et al., 2015).

Consultancy as a "source of legitimation" (Canato and Giangreco, 2011, p. 236) is less appropriate when applied to regulatory content however the consultants' outsider status and previous experience of regulatory engagements may have helped to legitimise the structure of the engagement. June described the client stream leads as "business figureheads who can make decisions and push things with the board and the executive committee", a good example of consultants working in the collaborative role of partner, able to leverage the client's network (Sturdy and Wright, 2011).



Existing theory proposes that consultants and clients entering a liminal state is desirable for creativity and change (Sturdy et al., 2006). May and June confirmed that the client requires consultants to be on client site five days each week and it could be argued that they are in a permanent state of liminality. June described working in joint teams with the client so it could be said that everyone finds themselves in “ambiguous work positions”, (Borg and Soderlund, 2015, p. 176) and clients are able to leverage the consultants “outsider” status (Sturdy, 2006, p. 933). It could also be argued that June, working closely with a senior client, is “an ally of management with new rites of passage in a temporary position of power” (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003, p. 267).

Some ethical dilemmas emerged during the research. These were not related directly to the work being undertaken for the client (Krehmeyer and Freeman, 2012) but to the conflicting demands of the client and commitments to undertake internal work. The mantra of the selected consultancy, voiced on many occasions by both May and June, was “client first” and an example of this during observation was the priority June gave to resolving a client issue by temporarily withdrawing from a recruitment exercise she was taking part in at base office until the client was satisfied. Existing theory regards personal attributes of the consultant and their ability to establish trust with the client as an integral part of ethics and professionalism (Greiner and Ennsfellner, 2010).

### **5.3 Internal demands**

The theme of internal demands was constructed from data on types of internal work, how internal work is performed including the impact of targets and the role of the consultant. This theme links to existing theory on the role of knowledge, consulting methods and service offers and consulting identity.

Consultancies cite the ability to manage and share knowledge as a core capability for competitive advantage (Dunford, 2000; Powell and Ambrosini, 2012). June described her consulting colleagues from the French practice as “having managed a similar, very large regulatory implementation”. As such they were bringing tacit knowledge based on experience as well as codified knowledge from their previous engagement (Teece, 1998). June and her team were building their knowledge and experience of regulatory projects through participation as well as bringing customer experience expertise. In the course of the project participants were therefore engaging in multidirectional knowledge transfer across consultancy practices and to and from the client (Hicks et al., 2009). The consultancy practices and the client team were working side by side, engaging in formal and informal knowledge sharing (Taminiau et al., 2009).

May and June were involved in a broad range of internal work. During observations, May was co-ordinating the inputs for a service offer by collating credentials and templates and developing specific marketing insight on “dark social”, a buzz word for using messaging applications in marketing (Jung and Kieser, 2012). May thought “the output would probably be used for building team knowledge”. She was also developing codified knowledge “as a by-product” of the in-flight regulatory project. June was developing project related knowledge from her role and working with the financial services sector lead to develop specialist content for a service offer to take to potential clients (Jung and Kieser, 2012).

The practice lead had recently changed the targets for internal work. June explained that there are a lot of junior consultants and they were under pressure to do internal work and impress by being active and involved in everything. They started questioning: “How much value is it adding that somebody’s got a finger in all these pies?” Ad-hoc informants during

observation had also expressed concern that the output from internal work was hardly ever used. June said that, “the steer now is to focus on one thing and actually deliver something”. May was delighted as she felt most consultants’ biggest complaint was, “the amount of internal work we have to do and how it impacts our calibration if we don’t do enough of it”. May and June were uncertain how the new targets would work in practice. May and June were both involved in recruitment and responsible for counselees. June was aiming to expand her recruitment role and become “point person for financial services recruitment”. June saw this as a way of raising her profile by becoming involved in recruitment strategy and contributing more to practice management in preparation for promotion to principal, which she described as, “similar to a political campaign” explaining that promotion to principal requires the unanimous support of the UK consulting leadership team. June was also responsible for leading the “active inclusion” stream of a strategic people project aimed at retaining staff.

Reid, (2015) found that the performance evaluation system was used to control consulting identity and in the research, performance appraisal and calibration, the process of ranking consultants, did appear to be a major factor in May and June undertaking a broad range of internal activities. Another factor was individual aspirations, by expanding her recruitment role and the planned step up to the role of engagement lead, June appeared to be constructing an identity that aligned with the role of principal (Alvesson and Robertson, 2006).

May and June agreed that most internal work required core consulting skills although they believed the dual role had enabled them to develop enhanced prioritisation skills. June felt it was not always clear what is meant by internal work. June initially transferred from a different part of the organisation where she was not required to do internal work. She had

no idea what she was supposed to do or how to get internal work and struggled for some time. June's counsellor left the organisation and "my new counsellor sat me down and explained it to me and I got it!" In June's experience, this is also a problem for new recruits from outside consultancy who are unused to having "two jobs" and find the pressure of having targets for internal work as well as client delivery "too intense". New consultants attend a mandatory course within the first few weeks of joining. This covers standard methods, skills and ways of working as well as the values of the consultancy but as June observed, "it takes more than a course to understand what it means to be a consultant".

The consulting lifestyle makes it difficult to have a social life outside work. June found that her old relationships were more sustainable because "it's very hard to make a plan with a new friend and then have to cancel it at the last minute with them thinking you're avoiding them". This appears to support assertions by Reid (2015) that expected identity in consultancy means being primarily committed to and available for work at all times and in all places with no boundaries between work and personal life. The upside of the consulting lifestyle for some consultants was the opportunity to travel. Prior to her current project, June had worked in the United States and had "a great time", whilst acknowledging that it had taken its toll in terms of missing personal and family events. The absence of boundaries between work and personal life is especially true when working away from home (Reid, 2015). The desire to travel was also voiced by consultants in counsellor meetings during observation. This rather sophisticated and appealing part of the consultants' role is what Gill (2015) finds is part of the elite consulting identity that contributes to status anxiety for consultants relating to the potential loss of that status. May and June showed no signs of anxiety and described feeling supported by their respective counsellors and the practice lead (Six and Sorge, 2008). Another common thread that motivated the research

participants and informants was the variety. June reflected on her ten years in consulting and that she, “never thought I would last in any job for that long”. June’s view was “when you become an expert it is time to move on” and felt there was a risk of boredom if you stayed on a project for so long that it ceased to be a challenge. Remaining on the project in these circumstances might well result in what Costas and Kärreman (2016: 75) describe as an “arrested identity” where the construction of the self as bored allows consultants to maintain their aspirations and idealised understandings of themselves.

#### 5.4 Support networks

The theme of support networks was constructed from data on people development, internal and external networks. This theme links to existing theory on networks and “high-trust organisations” (Six and Sorge, 2008, p. 858), socio-materiality and social identity.

Internal networking was important to the research participants and they preferred to work from base office on Fridays when client commitments permit so as to network and leverage the socio-material aspects of the organisation (Orlikowski, 2007). Observations showed base office was packed on Fridays. The office had recently been refurbished and the design lent itself to networking. There were oblong tables with low dividers between seats, a mix of high tables and stools, circular meeting tables and circular soft seating areas. It was evident during observations that consultants spend much of their time on telephone conferences. A further aspect of support is technology, the consultancy had recently replaced laptops under a new contract and June and other consultants nearby were experiencing issues and this was generating some impatience. Consultants rely on technology to perform their consultancy-facing role and often their client-facing role as well. Technology is a fundamental aspect of the consultants’ day-to-day life and it is taken for granted, until it fails (Orlikowski, 2007).

June believed the role of counsellor was a vital element of support, especially after her own struggle when she first joined the practice. June confirmed that “grow or go principles” were not enforced (Richter et al., 2008, p. 194). The emphasis instead was on achieving billable utilisation targets and meeting internal work commitments. The emphasis was also on development, training and undertaking “stretch roles” to ensure that skills are continuously developed and updated. This was a recurring theme in observed meetings with counselees who were keen to ensure that their role had sufficient “stretch” for development purposes and to stand up to the scrutiny of the appraisal process. Achieving breadth of experience on client engagements is also important, June described how most of the junior members of her client engagement team have needed to move on because a year and a half on a project is too long. Some had stayed in a different role to provide some continuity for the client.

Consultants were encouraged to build networks through internal work, team meetings and calls and social events. May said of internal work, “I get the point that it helps build your networks. If you only do client work and you’re out on client site five days like I am now, then you never get to see the rest of your team and no one knows who you are”. On the evening of one of the observation days a practice team social event had been organised at a local wine bar and it was well supported by consultants and practice leads, many had travelled to attend. The consultancy appeared to recognise the importance of building relationships by enabling colleagues to meet informally, outside of work engagements. This is an indication of a “high trust organisation” (Six and Sorge, 2008: 858). When asked about external networks June commented, “I don’t have much capacity after I’ve done client work and internal work for any structured activities outside”. June said she does have a strong network of ex-colleagues, now close friends, with whom she often meets and speaks to,

“because you know, consulting can be high turnover so we’re still in touch but I just consider that social activity”. This may indicate self-categorisation as a member of a social identity group (Mühlhaus and Bouwmeester, 2016).

## 5.5 Conflicting demands

The theme of conflicting demands focuses on the conflict between internal work and client delivery. There is also a conflict between expected consulting identity (Reid, 2015), work-life balance and the demands of family. These conflicts align with the research focus of the management consultants’ dual role and existing theory on duality.

June described her dual role as “having to wear different hats throughout the day”. There are similarities with the way in which Keister and Paranjpey (2012) identified two distinct ways for the organisational design consultant to utilize “self” as an instrument through the dual consulting identities of designer and evaluator. There also parallels with the duality identified by Farjoun (2010), where companies must be innovative, flexible, and responsive to change whilst performing reliably and consistently. This is similar to management consultants being involved in developing innovative new service offers and specialist knowledge as part of their internal work whilst continuing to meet and even exceed client delivery expectations.

May and June found it very difficult to do internal work on client site. Internal work often involves calls and June explained “we are on the trading floor so technically we’re not supposed to be on our mobiles anyway”. June said she was, “strict with my team about calls (relating to internal work) being heard by the client”. June described the challenge of having to join essential calls with internal work teams during the day, “so, a big part of the conflict is making sure that you slip out without being noticed because, if client says: “Oh, can we sit down and work through this?” then it’s difficult”. May recalled a time when she

was working on an internal e-commerce proposal and having to join multiple calls with consultants from the UK, Sweden and France at a time when it was busy on client site, “it’s difficult you know, I worry and stress about it... not like the client ever said anything but she sees us sitting in another room, on a call, with our laptops”. May said that, although it did not impact the project work as such, she felt that it could “potentially adversely affect the client relationship if it was to continue over long period”.

May was conscious of the conflict between client work and the demands of her family, “I mean, how often can you say to a client: “Oh actually I need to leave at 5pm today to pick up my daughter from nursery.” I’m feeling lucky that I have been able to do that “I’ve been upfront about it, like three days a week I need to leave at 5pm to pick up my daughter from nursery”. May said she had found the adjustment quite hard, “before, all my time could be spent working, there was no one else that needed my time ....maybe you’d have a deadline the next day for 9am and its fine, you can stay and work on client site until midnight”. May’s perceived difficulty appears to be that she can no longer comply with expected consulting identity, primarily committed to and available for work at all times and in all places (Reid, 2015). May said she often logged back in to do client work in the evenings once her daughter was settled for the night. The consultancy business model relies on people working long hours and the nature of flexible working, as extended to May with the agreement of the client, does not mean working fewer hours (Donnelly, 2015).

Maternity returners were a specific focus for the consultancy as part of the initiative to retain staff. May’s return had been well managed, an engagement lead had contacted her a week prior to her return and she started on client site within a few days. There does however appear to be a further conflict between the demands of family and the emphasis on skill development. May commented that having a child “isn’t great career-wise.” May’s



description of her current project, “so it’s not anything ground breaking, not like a big digital project and it’s not even in the subject area that I’m particularly interested in...”, appeared to indicate that she felt she was compromising on development to work locally. Donnelly (2015) found that female consultants tend to accept the negative impact on their relative career progression of not being fully mobile.

## 5.6 Summary

This chapter considered four themes constructed from the data and used to form the analytical framework: external demands; internal demands; support networks and conflicting demands. Themes were examined in turn using examples from the data and interpreted in the context of existing theory relating to management consultancy reviewed in Chapter 2: Literature Review. The next chapter summarises the findings in relation to the research aims and objectives and considers the validity and limitations of the research.

## Chapter 6: Findings

### 6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter sought to interpret the research data in the context of existing theory. This chapter provides a summary of the main findings of the research and relates these directly to the research aims and objectives, drawing on the research data to provide examples to support the findings. The chapter concludes by considering the extent to which the aims and objectives of the research have been met and reflects on methodological issues, the validity and limitations of the research. The chapter also considers opportunities for future research and implications for practitioners.

### 6.2 Key findings

The central research question and aim of the research was to understand:

**“How do practicing management consultants cope with the duality of their role?”**

The specific objectives were to discover: how conflicts arise; how they are managed; how does the dual role drive the use of specific skills and behaviours, where and when does internal work take place, the of time spent and how do consultants reconcile ethical issues when managing the conflicting demands of internal work and client delivery. Key findings relating to each of the research objectives are as follows:

#### 6.2.1 How do conflicts arise and how are they managed?

The research participants were both performing full-time roles on a client engagement and undertaking a broad range of internal work. At the same time, the terms of their client engagement required them to be on client site five days each week. In this situation, it is possible to see that conflicting demands may arise. Nevertheless, May and June were highly motivated to meet client and internal demands. In June's words, “it's client first but then you do want to honour your internal commitments”.

**The main conflict arose from the requirement for a physical presence and having to perform internal consultancy related tasks whilst on client site**

The conflict was exacerbated by the requirement for consultants to be on client site five days each week. June confirmed that this is not uncommon and new recruits are now asked if they are willing to work away from home five days each week. Internal work often involves calls with internal work teams during the day. June described this as a challenge as, “we are on the trading floor so technically we’re not supposed to be on our mobiles anyway”. June said her usual solution was to “hide from the client” on client site or “go home or to the office”. June’s direct client often worked at home on Friday’s and June would sometimes take the opportunity to work from base office. However, there was an instance during observation one Friday when June had to withdraw from a recruitment assessment exercise at base office to handle an issue where the client (not June’s direct client) was unhappy and appeared to be testing that she was available for client work. May and June both managed the conflict by performing most of their internal work in the evenings and at weekends.

**Consultants work long, irregular hours and there is a conflict between the expectations of the dual role and work-life balance.**

It was not only internal work that was performed in the evenings and weekends. June said: “With something like recruitment, it is going to be in the working day because that’s when the candidate’s available, then you end up doing your client work afterwards”. May also said that she “often logged back on in the evening to do more client work”.

June reflected that “being away on projects or working in the evenings and at weekends and missing personal and family events is probably the biggest personal toll”. Working long hours appeared to be accepted practice. June recalled leading a sales bid when the team

worked all over the weekend and until midnight on the Monday. May recalled a “short, intensive project” where for a few weeks she worked on client site from 7am with a short break at 5pm to pick her daughter up from nursery and settle her for the night before starting work again at home and working until midnight. May and June appeared to completely accept this as part of being a consultant.

### **There is a conflict between career development and the demands of family**

Whilst not central to the substantive aim of understanding the conflicting demands of the consultants’ client-facing and consultancy-facing roles, this conflict was highlighted by May’s situation and may have implications for management consultancy generally. May described her current role as “just a role and ...not even in the subject area that I’m particularly interested in” but needed to work locally so she could pick her daughter up from nursery three days each week and felt “lucky that I have been able to do that”. May appeared to have compromised on personal development to meet the demands of family.

#### **6.2.2 How does the dual role drive the use of specific skills and behaviours?**

May and June agreed that, whereas most internal work required core consulting skills, coping with the dual role had enabled them to develop specific skills such as enhanced prioritisation skills. June believed it was not always obvious what “internal work” meant, she herself had struggled with the concept when she first joined. In June’s experience, this is a problem for new recruits from outside consultancy who are unused to having “two jobs”. New consultants attend a course within the first few weeks of joining. This covers standard methods, skills and ways of working as well as the values of the consultancy but as June observed, “it takes more than a course to understand what it means to be a consultant”. The consultancy provides mandatory training for recruitment and counselling

as a pre-requisite to undertaking these roles, to ensure consistent standards. Consultants have not necessarily performed either of these roles prior to joining.

#### 6.2.3 How much time is spent on internal work?

May said she spent an average of two to three hours each week in the evenings and weekends in addition to calls in the day but that “previously (before having a child) it was at least double that because I had more time and more internal work to do”. May said she did not have time to fit in internal work like she did before, “if I wanted to I could spend a hundred percent of my time working in the evenings and weekends but now I don’t have that luxury”. June said she “probably spent half a day of working hours every week and then potentially an additional three or four hours in evenings and time at weekends”. June described it as “getting used to a different rhythm ... you are not going to be able to focus on one thing for any length of time so you have to break it up”.

#### 6.2.4 When and where is internal work accomplished?

May and June both preferred doing internal work in the evenings or at weekends. June’s view was, “that is the only time you are going to be able to focus, see it through and do it properly, especially if it is something complex and you need the thinking space”. May believed, “the reality is, spending five days on client site is not compatible with doing internal work in the day” and “if there is a deadline (for internal work) you are working every evening”. In May’s words, “it’s difficult enough taking a call for internal work on client site but actually doing internal work, you could never do that on client site really. I mean, I guess it depends on your client, but I feel that wouldn't be right”.

#### 6.2.5 How do management consultants reconcile ethical issues when managing the conflicting demands of internal work and client delivery?

Ethical issues occurred when consultants had to perform internal work on client site. May and June avoided this whenever possible by doing internal work in the evenings and

weekends or the occasions when they could work from base office. The exception was when they had to join calls with internal teams during the day. June did not want the client to hear or see this and preferred to slip out unnoticed or hide from the client on client site. May believed that joining calls in the day could, “adversely affect the client relationship if it continued over a long period”. Spending sufficient time on client work did not appear to be an issue. May and June agreed that time spent on internal work during the day usually resulted in spending longer hours on client site or doing client work in the evenings.

**A further finding was the importance of internal support networks in enabling consultants to perform their dual role**

At the time of the observation May had not been to base office for four months and it had taken a month for her to arrange to come in. May said she was, “feeling detached from her team”. During observations, base office was packed on Friday’s with consultants on telephone conferences, engaged in ad-hoc informal networking, meeting with their counsellor and visits to technology support. Consultants were encouraged to build networks through internal work, team meetings and calls and social events such as the practice team social event on one of the observation days when many had travelled to attend.

## **6.3 Conclusion**

### **6.3.1 Summary**

The substantive aim of the research was to contribute to existing academic knowledge of management consultancy by gaining an understanding of the nature of the internal and external demands on management consultants. The findings demonstrate that the management consultant has two roles, their client-facing role and their consultancy-facing role and this is predominantly what differentiates them from an ordinary worker.

Management consultants undertake a broad range of internal work alongside client delivery, motivated partly by targets and the appraisal process but also their desire to grow and progress and to meet managerial expectations. This aligns with existing theory that control may be achieved through the self-positioning of employees within managerially inspired discourses and a social identity that promotes the desire to accomplish high standards of performance (Alvesson and Robertson, 2006). It also demonstrates that performance appraisal plays an important part (Reid, 2015).

The main conflict of the dual role arose from the requirement for a physical presence and having to perform internal work on client site. Consultants avoided this as far as possible by doing internal work in the evenings and at weekends. Participants tended to work long hours on client and internal work and accepted the conflict with work-life balance as part of being a consultant (Alvesson and Robertson, 2006; Reid, 2015). There was a further conflict between the expectations of the dual role and the demands of family. Maternity leave returners were a specific focus for the consultancy as part of the initiative to retain staff. Providing development roles for an increasing number of consultants who want to work locally may prove challenging. Making this work within a fair appraisal system, even more so (Reid, 2015).

Research participants believed the dual role was difficult for new joiners from outside the industry to understand and the consulting lifestyle was not really something you can teach. The emphasis on achieving utilisation targets aligns with theory that suggests the consultancy business model relies on consultants working long hours (Donnelly, 2015). Ethical issues resulted from performing internal work, mainly calls, on client site. When calls with internal work teams had to be taken on client site efforts were made to do this out of sight and earshot of the client. Time lost to internal work during the day was offset by time

spent on client work in the evenings and at weekends. However, research participants were deeply uncomfortable at having to take calls relating to internal work on client site and recognised that this may undermine their ability to establish trust with clients (Greiner and Ennsfellner, 2010).

Internal support networks were an important aspect of enabling consultants to perform their dual role by feeling supported from a practical perspective (Orlikowski, 2007) and to leverage their social identity (Mühlhaus and Bouwmeester, 2016) and build relationships informally and through internal work team (Six and Sorge, 2008). There was also a strong emphasis on supporting development through the counselling process and securing the right client engagement role.

#### 6.3.2 Contribution

The research focus was the duality of the management consultants' role and parallels were found with utilising "self" as an instrument through dual consulting identities (Keister and Paranjpey, 2012, p. 90). There are also similarities to the duality of companies performing consistently whilst being innovative and responsive to change (Farjoun, 2010). The aim was to build on and extend existing theory of duality through a study of the dual role of the management consultant. The contribution of this research is that it looks directly at the inner workings of management consultancy, how the consultancy-facing role works in practice and the conflicts and issues of performing the dual role. This has brought a different perspective to existing knowledge on management consultancy drawing the consultancy-facing and client-facing roles of the management consultant together and examining how management consultancy as practice unfolds.



### 6.3.3 Limitations of the research

The research was a single case study conducted with a consultancy practice within a single management consultancy. The results cannot therefore be generalised to other management consultancies (Tsang, 2014) although findings may well provide a sound basis for further research across a range of management consultancies (Kanter, 1977, cited in Bryman and Bell, 2015). It may be possible to generalise some of the findings to other practices within the selected management consultancy, however the targets for internal work had recently changed within the practice under investigation and this may well have had an impact on the responses of research participants and ad-hoc informants. It was not certain that other practices would adopt the same approach.

The research participants were engaged on a regulatory project that was subject to a non-disclosure agreement and it was not therefore possible to conduct any of the research on client site. The investigation was therefore restricted to the consultants' base office and research relating to client work was based entirely on accounts from research participants and informants and observing calls with the client from base office.

In addition to the research taking place at the consultants' base office observations always took place on Fridays as this is the day when consultants generally aim to work from base office when client commitments permit. This was of benefit to the research given the limited time available but conducting observations at base office on other days may have produced different results.

A further potential limitation was the position of the researcher as a previous employee of the management consultancy and previous engagement lead to each of the research participants. This may have had an impact initially but the researcher/research participant relationship was quickly established with the participants taking the lead and the

researcher observing. The advantage was that many consultants who were previously colleagues were keen to provide ad-hoc accounts once they were aware of the research topic

#### 6.3.4 Future research

Further investigation into the duality of the management consultants' role including observations on client site and possible input from clients would provide an additional dimension and a more rounded view of the management consultants' dual role and ethical considerations.

The ability to retain experienced staff such as maternity leave returners has implications for management consultancy generally. However, success may depend on the extent to which consultancies are prepared to make structural and cultural changes (Ford and Collinson, 2011). A study of how this is being addressed across a range of management consultancies could provide a valuable contribution to existing theory and practitioners.

#### 6.3.5 Implications for practitioners

Making consultancy work for maternity leave returners is a challenge. The opportunities to work locally are likely to be limited and if the consultancy wants to maintain the trust and motivation of their consultants it is important that roles are compatible with skills rather than just circumstances (Six and Sorge, 2008). There is a further question on how the appraisal system will reflect the concessions to maternity leave returners.

The trend towards five days each week on client site appears to be part of a new culture and it is not clear that it is needed or valued by clients. This may not be compatible with consultants having sufficient access to important internal support networks or achieving work-life balance, also important for staff retention.

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## Appendix 1: Information Leaflet

### **Management Consultancy as Practice: A Study of the Duality of the Management Consultants' Role**

I am a post graduate research student at the Open University Business School. I am conducting research into the internal role of the management consultant an aspect of consulting that is somewhat invisible to the outside world and it seems the academic community as there is very little existing literature. Management consultants are often responsible for internal business leadership roles as well as developing business; people and knowledge alongside client delivery. "Duality" describes the sometimes, conflicted state between consultants' internal and external roles.

The objective of the study is to develop an in-depth insight into the duality of the internal and external roles of management consultants. I am aiming to formulate a "Day in the Life of" view of the management consultants' role. If you would like to participate in this research data will be gathered through shadowing each management consultant involved for a period of one to two days. If during the shadowing exercise sensitive or confidential information is to be discussed that should not be shared or the client does not give consent for the researcher to be on site, the management consultant may request that the researcher not be present. Shadowing will be followed by an informal interview approximately two weeks later. Field notes will be made during the shadowing exercise. The interview will be audio recorded to ensure that your contribution is accurately captured or if you prefer, written notes can be taken instead. You will have the opportunity to review the final transcript of the interview to ensure it accurately reflects your views.

Extracts from your interview may be included in reports to be submitted by me for examination at the Open University and may also be used in papers for publication however, your responses will be confidential and any such extracts will be carefully anonymised.

The research will follow the Open University research ethical guidelines. At the end, a summary copy of the research findings will be forwarded to you on request. The data generated will be stored at Open University and will be destroyed after five years.

Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the research project at any time until the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2017. After this point data will have been processed and it will not be possible to extract the specific data you have provided. In the unlikely event that you should feel unhappy about anything you said and would like me to remove it from the records, you can contact me on the email below and I will remove all or part of your words. This can be done at any point up until the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2017. Data will be referred to by a pseudonym in any publications arising from the research. The data generated will be securely stored and password protected on Open University servers and will be destroyed after 5 years

Thank you very much for your time and assistance.

Jeanette Hartley

Post Graduate Research Student

Strategy and Management – Open University Business School

Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA

[Jeanette.hartley@open.ac.uk](mailto:Jeanette.hartley@open.ac.uk)

***If you wish to talk to a third party about this research, you can contact my research supervisor***

***Dr Alex Wright at [Alex.Wright@open.ac.uk](mailto:Alex.Wright@open.ac.uk).***

## Appendix 2: Consent Form

**Faculty of Business and Law**  
**Open University Business School**  
**RESEARCH PROJECT**  
**Management Consultancy as Practice:**  
**A study of the Duality of the Management Consultants' Role**

Name of participant:

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Name of principal investigator(s): Jeanette Hartley

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1. I consent to participate in this project, the details of which have been explained to me, and I have been provided with written information to keep for future reference.
2. I understand everything that is in the written information namely that I will be observed and interviewed and I agree that the researcher may use the results as described in the written information.
3. I acknowledge that:
  - a. I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project without explanation or prejudice and to request the destruction of any data that have been gathered from me until it is anonymized at the point of transcription on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2017. After this point data will have been processed and it will not be possible to withdraw any unprocessed data I have provided
  - b. The project is for the purpose of research
  - c. I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements
  - d. I have been informed that with my consent the data generated will be securely stored and password protected on Open University servers and will be destroyed after 5 years
  - e. Any data from me will be referred to by a pseudonym in any publications arising from the research
  - f. I have been informed that a summary copy of the research findings will be forwarded to me, should I request this.

I consent to being audio-taped/video-recorded\_ ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**

(please tick)

I wish to receive a copy of the summary project report on research findings\_\_ ☐ **yes** ☐ **no**  
(please tick)

Participant signature:

Date:

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Jeanette Hartley

Post Graduate Research Student

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## Appendix 3: Interview Topic Guide

Topic	Level 1 (Introductory)	Level 2 (Probing)
Interviewee	<p>Job Title?</p> <p>Time in role?</p> <p>Experience?</p> <p>Previous experience?</p>	<p>Aspirations?</p> <p>Personal?</p> <p>Family?</p>
Role	<p>External?</p> <p>Internal?</p> <p>Targets?</p>	<p>External Relationships?</p> <p>Internal Relationships?</p> <p>Networks?</p>
Internal work	<p>What is it</p> <p>Where do you do it</p> <p>How do you do it</p> <p>How much time do you spend on it?</p>	<p>When have you used it?</p> <p>When have others used it?</p> <p>How useful is it?</p>
External work	<p>Type of work?</p> <p>What does it involve?</p> <p>Where do you do it?</p> <p>How much time do you spend on client site?</p>	<p>To what extent is this a stretch role?</p>
Duality	<p>What are the conflicts?</p> <p>When do conflicting demands occur?</p> <p>How do you handle these?</p> <p>What are the ethical considerations?</p>	<p>What is the personal impact?</p> <p>What skills are required?</p> <p>What other coping mechanisms?</p>
What else	<p>What else is relevant?</p>	

## Appendix 4: Day in the life of a management consultant

This is a consolidation of fieldnotes and reflexive notes from observations of the two consultants who participated in the research. The observations took place on three separate Fridays at the consultants' base office.

Time	Activity
0900	It is Friday, a popular day for consultants to work from their base office and network. The office has recently been refurbished and the new décor lends itself to networking. There are oblong tables with low dividers between seats, a mix of high tables and stools, circular meeting tables and circular soft seating areas. I am spending the day with the two research participants: May and June. We find seats in the Customer Experience team area. Many people are on teleconferences and all around me informal chats are taking place, consultants catching up with colleagues about where they are currently assigned and what they are working on.
	This is the first time May has been in the office in four months because her client engagement demands five days on client site. She says she is “feeling detached from her team”. It has taken a month to arrange with the client that she can work from base office today. May usually has to do her Internal work before and after work so she now takes the opportunity to get on with producing a piece of marketing insight she has been

Time	Activity
	<p>tasked with which will later be used to improve the knowledge of her team. She is also taking the opportunity to do some administration: timecard, expenses etc., which is also usually done at home.</p>
	<p>June is on the same client engagement as May but manages to get into the office more often as her main client works from home on Fridays. June believes that: “although projects are often sold as five days on client site these days, it is not always necessary or even valued by the client”. June explains that the engagement involves working in a secure area near the trading floor so strictly speaking they should not even use mobile phones. June says she: “hides from the client or goes home to undertake internal work”.</p>
0930	<p>June has been experiencing IT problems, she has lost data and her e mail is not working so we are off to Technology Support so they can fix it. There is a new technology contract and everyone has recently been issued with a new laptop. Many are experiencing IT issues, the consultant opposite is complaining because his search results are coming out in French. It seems the settings have not been altered for the UK. I reflect that reliable technology is vital for consultants to do their job and this must be quite disruptive and potentially stressful.</p>
	<p>June tells me about her internal work. In addition to producing knowledge relating to her project, she is very involved in recruitment: screening applications, telephone interviews, face to face interviews and participating in recruitment assessment centres held in base office. She is hoping</p>

Time	Activity
	<p>to extend and formalise her recruitment role within the team. She is also involved in work on “active inclusion”, specifically gender and work life balance, in response to a staff survey. There is a lot of work going on in response to the survey which highlighted instances of people returning from maternity leave, a big life decision and no-one being available to greet them. June believes: “there are plenty of London based projects for maternity leave returners to rotate through but this does not happen”. The consultancy is benchmarking against other consultancies as some are much better at aspects of people management, especially maternity leave.</p>
1000	<p>June is due to do a group observation in a recruitment assessment centre and we go to the “Recruitment Village” an area on the floor below where the assessment centre is taking place. June has received an email from the client, not her direct face-off but the head of another stream. He is saying he is unhappy with this week’s dashboard. He wants to know “whether June is available” which she interprets as him being unhappy about her being at base office rather than on client site. The assessment centre is running late so June calls him. June is patiently explaining why an aspect of the dashboard is green and offers to change the heading. The group exercise is starting and recruitment are frantically waving and indicating that we should take our seats in the room but June pays no attention, refusing to be rushed with the client. June resolves the issue with the client and we take our observers’ seats in the group session which has been running for a few minutes. One of the other observers is</p>

Time	Activity
	<p>messaging on his phone and I wonder if that is also a client issue. I reflect on the conflicting internal and external demands and not being able to focus on the matter in hand. The group exercise involves a case study. The brief for the five potential recruits is to jointly prepare a proposal for a consulting project which they must then present to a panel. Each observer is allocated one potential recruit to observe and provide feedback but can make notes on others as well. A different panel will receive the presentation.</p>
	<p>June hands in her notes to the facilitator from recruitment and we return to our table. I notice a wall of photos of consultants at one end of the office. June explains that these are consultants currently “on the bench” i.e. not assigned to projects. Leads can see who is available when they are resourcing their projects and sales bids. June tells me about a bid team she ran when they worked all over the weekend and until midnight on the Monday, everyone preparing their own section and June consolidating it. June had allowed everyone to work from home on Saturday but the Vice President (VP) leading had gone in on Saturday just in case he was needed in person. I reflect on how long working hours are accepted and the support demonstrated by the VP.</p>
1100	<p>June is meeting with one of her counselees who has recently been promoted. It is usual for meetings with counselees to take place every month. It is important to have a “stretch” role that will assist development and the counselee has managed to expand his role but is concerned that it</p>

Time	Activity
	<p>does not provide sufficient stretch at his new grade and that this may affect is appraisal rating. He is keen to travel and mentions a secondment opportunity in the US.</p>
1130	<p>There has been some turnover at our table but they are all on the 'phone. One consultant is showing a new starter around and making introductions. I am sitting with May as June is on a webcast, pre-work for a leadership skills course she is attending in Paris in a few weeks. June has not been able to find a desk so is sitting in one of the soft seat areas with her laptop. May is sending e mails to gather credentials and templates for a sales and workforce management service offer, another piece of internal work she is responsible for.</p> <p>A colleague comes over to talk to May. His counsellee is coming back from maternity leave and is looking for support and advice. May returned from maternity leave just over a year ago and the colleague is asking for contacts his counsellee can talk to</p>
1200	<p>May has a meeting with one of her counsellees but this time we are off to a local café. The counsellee is in the graduate trainee programme. He is on what he describes as his “perfect project” from a content perspective and it is also local so he can pursue a hobby he is passionate about. I reflect that this may prove difficult when he gets a project that involves working away.</p>

Time	Activity
1300	<p>Word has got out about my topic and consultants are keen to express their views. Their concerns focus on the pressure to be involved in knowledge and service offer development, write blogs etc. and the belief that most of the outputs are never used. June explains that targets for internal work in customer experience have changed: “we have been speaking about this for a while in the team and we’re kind of implementing it now”. June explained that there are a lot of junior consultants and they are under so much pressure just to be known by doing internal work and seen as being active and involved in everything. However, they started questioning, “how much value is it adding?” “Would it be better to focus?”. So, the steer now is to focus on one thing and actually deliver something. June was not sure how this would work in practice as the change was so recent. I reflect that this change, made by the sponsor of my research, occurred between my initial contact with him to gain access and the research taking place. The impact is likely to be that people are more positive about internal work.</p>
	<p>June was meant to be having a meeting about expanding her recruitment role with the principal from her team who is taking the lead on recruitment but his telephone conference is running about 30 minutes over so they have agreed to rearrange. We wander out to get some lunch and talk about June’s aspirations. June is keen to progress to Principal which requires the support of the entire leadership team made up of six or so senior VPs. June describes the process as “more like a political campaign”.</p>

Time	Activity
1400	<p>June is seeing another counsellor and I agree to bow out as she is having problems on her project. June feels that she deserves protection. Instead I sit with May who is talking to resourcing about her next project. She likes her current project but it does not involve customer experience specialist content and skills. She is also finding 5 days on client site hard. If she stays she wants to negotiate spending time at base office on Fridays. There is an interesting project coming up but it is for 6 weeks and may be too intensive. May tells me about a 4 week project she was on earlier in the year and it was too much work to do in the timescale. May has to pick her daughter up at 5pm from nursery three days each week and she was having to start work on client site at 7am, leave to pick her daughter up at 5pm and then start again at home after her daughter had gone to sleep and work until midnight.</p>
15:00	<p>I am sitting with June in one of the meeting rooms. She is doing a recruitment interview on the telephone. The telephone interview is the second stage of the recruitment process. If they get through initial screening they get a telephone interview, the emphasis is on content knowledge and sector awareness. If they get through the telephone interview they are invited to attend an assessment centre. If the applicant is a specialist there may be a face-to-face interview prior to the assessment centre.</p>



Time	Activity
1530	June is doing project appraisal with a team member for her mid-year review. June is using these reviews to raise concerns about disengagement with clients in workshops e.g. answering e mails and other work not directly related to the client. I reflect on the recurring theme of conflicting demands and not being able to focus on the matter in hand.
	The team member has recently been promoted to consultant from the graduate recruitment programme and is now a fully-fledged member of the customer experience practice. I ask about internal work and get the expected response that the change to focusing on fewer things and do them well is much better.
1600	June had been summoned by her consultancy project lead (who is also her counsellor and competency team lead) and they had eventually identified this time when they are both free from calls and meetings. The lead has made handwritten notes on June's draft proposal for an extension to the project. June must now get these to a team member to do the updates as she is on a course next week. She decides it will be quicker to scan the annotated document and sets about doing this.
17:00	May has left the building taking a rare opportunity to pick her daughter up early. I am sitting with June on a call about her "active inclusion" people project aimed at retaining staff. June is doing the work for one of the hypothesis, the remaining ones have been allocated to others and

Time	Activity
	<p>three of them are on the call, the purpose of which is to agree how to present progress in a concise and meaningful way to the sponsoring VP.</p> <p>They eventually agree a grouping for the hypothesis and the composition of the two slides but it takes an hour.</p>
1800	June is finishing off emails ahead of her break next week and we call it a day.

## Appendix 5: Analytical Framework

### 5a External Demands

Code	Category	Themes and Concepts	Theory
Short very intensive projects	Client Engagement	External Demands	Occupational identity
Six month implementations v six-week strategy			
Deliver something rather than say "here are our recommendations" and walk away			
Embedded in the content as well as project management			
Able to add value by applying specialist customer experience knowledge			
Leveraging the clients network	Client relationship		Client relationship
Understanding the needs of the client			
Putting the client first			
Establishing a working relationship			
Building mutual respect			
Building rapport with the client			
Calls in secure area on client site	Ethical considerations		Consultancy as a profession
Hiding from the client to do internal work			
Client unhappy at lack of physical presence			
Unable to switch off from client issue			
Dis-engagement during client meetings			

## 5b Internal demands

Code	Sub Category	Category	Themes and Concepts	Theory								
Developing codified knowledge	Knowledge development and sales bids	Types of Internal work	Internal Demands	Knowledge and Methods								
Developing service offers												
Lead or provide input for sales bid												
Writing blogs												
Developing specialist content												
Leading strategic people projects	Practice Management			Types of Internal work	Internal Demands	Consulting Identity						
Bench lead												
Practice people lead, operations lead, recruitment lead												
Leading a core service												
Leading a Centre of Excellence												
Maintaining CV for resourcing purposes	Administration						Types of Internal work	Internal Demands	Consulting Identity			
Expenses												
Timesheet and forecast												
Core consulting skills needed for internal work	Skills for internal work									Types of Internal work	Internal Demands	Consulting Identity
No dedicated team for developing knowledge/bids												
Bid team made up of who is on the bench												
working on bids when on a project, not sustainable												
New consultants find internal work too much pressure												
Transferee - no idea what "internal work" means												
Getting good internal work is competitive												
New counsellor explained it to me and I got it!												

Code	Sub Category	Category	Themes and Concepts	Theory
Two to three hours (double before I had my daughter)	Time spent on internal work	How internal work is performed		Consulting Identity
Time spent is in addition to the day				
Half a day of working hours on calls for internal work and 3 to 4 hours on top of that				
Finish at 6pm or midnight, still have internal work to do	When internal work is done			
Start work again after daughter has gone to bed				
The only way you are going to be able to focus is evenings and weekends				
If there is a deadline you are working every evening				
5 days on client site incompatible with doing internal work in the day				
Week is less stressful if internal work is done on Sunday				
Uncomfortable doing internal work on client site	Where internal work is done			
Joining call for internal work on client site when very busy - impact relationship with client				
Client unhappy about consultant being in the office instead of on client site				
Meet internal targets but client first	Impact of targets			
Impact on calibration if don't do enough internal work				
Concern over value of internal work				
Two areas of internal work "Grow" and "Talent"				
Target recently changed to fewer pieces of internal work but make more impact				
Client first but want to honour internal commitments				

## 5c Consulting identity

Code	Sub Category	Category	Themes and Concepts	Theory
Prioritisation skills	Consulting skills	Role of consultant		Consulting Identity
Ability to focus only on the task in hand				
Making people feel they have your full attention				
Being completely flexible				
Coping with ambiguity				
Developing a consulting personality?				
Difficult to integrate new joiners from industry	Motivation			
Need guidance through the consulting lifestyle				
Takes more than a course to learn consulting skills				
When you become an expert it's time to move on				
Risk of boredom when you know everything				
Difficult to maintain social life				
Enjoy travel but usually miss personal events	Gender impact			
Working from 7am until midnight not sustainable				
Can consulting be made to work for new mums?				
New mums don't want a four-day week				
Away from home five days may not work				
Need roles that are compatible				
Cannot drop returners back in and say: "Go"				

## 5d Support networks

Code	Sub Category	Category	Themes and Concepts	Theory
Counsellor represents me at end of year calibration/mid-year by exception	Counsellor	Staff management and development	Support network	Support networks and “high trust” organisations
Counsellor supports my promotion case/fast track promotion				
Monthly calls and meetings with Counsellor				
Discuss what sort of roles I should be doing				
Importance of having a good counsellor				
Counsellor tree for problem resolution/escalation				
Counsellor is consistent point of contact				
Training for recruitment so applicants get a consistent experience	Training			
Mandatory counsellor training				
Maintain personal development plan				
Mandatory training x 3 (development)				
Develop knowledge and skills	Impact of role on development			
Stretch role for appraisal purposes				
Role to prepare for promotion				
Appreciative client (as a reason to stay)				
Opportunity to work with Counsellor				
Vice President/Client wants consistency				
Rotate through project roles to retain knowledge (client benefit)				
Ex colleagues who resigned	External network	External support		
Ex colleagues who may be future clients				
No capacity for external networks				

Code	Sub Category	Category	Themes and Concepts	Theory
Vice President heading project	Internal network	Internal support	Support network	Support networks and “high trust” organisations
Network through internal work				
Network with sector teams/ Bi-weekly call for sector initiatives				
Consulting teams from other countries				
Practice call and town hall once each month				
Buddy for new joiners				
Practice Head; people lead; operations lead, pastoral care	Practical support			Socio-materiality
Human resource policies and practices				
IT support				
Working from base office				